

TWO DECADES OF GROWTH AND INNOVATION

There was a time when trucking and wellness were two ideas that were not normally associated with one another.

If truth be told, the trucking industry has over very many years been known to be, for the most part, susceptible to poor health and, in particular, to HIV/AIDS.

Every so often the incidence of sexually transmitted infections among truck drivers is high. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS among sex workers places truckers at high risk of exposure to the virus. This unfortunately has far reaching repercussions which not only impact truckers and their families but communities at large and more specifically the economy.

As the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS loomed larger, urgent action was no longer an option. The action we embarked upon gave rise to a more coordinated approach and focussed effort to increase awareness and education about HIV/AIDS.

In 1999, the National Bargaining Council for Road Freight and Logistics Industry launched Trucking Against Aids. It was subsequently relaunched as the Trucking Wellness Programme (TWP). The TWP is a primary healthcare provision programme dedicated to the wellness of people employed in the road freight and logistics industry. The major aim of the initiative has always been to create awareness on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections among long distance truck drivers, spouses and commercial sex workers.

In the past 20 years, the capacity of the TWP has grown into a sustainable model of primary healthcare delivery to the road freight and logistics industry through 21 fixed roadside wellness centres on major trucking routes spanning South Africa. The roadside wellness centres are complemented by a fleet of 7 mobile units.

All the wellness centres are situated along the country's major routes with high volumes of trucks. These include the N4 from Zeerust to Komatipoort, the N3 between Johannesburg and Durban, the full length of the N1 from Cape Town to the Beit Bridge border with Zimbabwe, and the N2 between Durban and Port Elizabeth, providing wellness centres to connect with long distance drivers, women at risk, and communities in each area.

The fixed and mobile clinics are manned by professional nurses and counsellors, who offer general healthcare testing such as blood pressure, glucose and cholesterol testing, measurement of body mass index, screening for tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections, as well as HIV testing, counselling, condom distribution, education and training.



A SMALL STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

In 2000, the first Roadside Wellness Centre was established in Beaufort West in the Western Cape. It broke ground in the provision of health and wellness services to long distance drivers who spent an average of 12 hours behind the wheel of a truck. An old shipping container was converted into a state of the art clinic allowing for an innovative, unique, proactive and successful approach in the testing, counselling and prevention HIV/AIDS in South Africa. The clinics which are known as Roadside Wellness Centres are now spread throughout South Africa's major road networks, providing the highest standard of care that is convenient and easily accessible.

"The first Roadside Wellness Centre was a catalyst in providing access to healthcare services for drivers, as they were unable to do so without extensive effort previously. It gave us an opportunity to prevent and treat HIV through education, counselling and testing of drivers. The work of the TWP is underpinned by addressing underlying issues through educational support. We inform and educate industry members on the importance of practicing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle at all times," explains Tertius Wessels, project manager of TWP.

With the services offered by TWP proving to be important to the industry, expansion was inevitable and a very necessary requirement.

In 2001, two more Roadside Wellness Centres were established in Harrismith in the Free State and Musina in Limpopo.

In 2002, three more Roadside Wellness Centres were established in Ventersburg in the Free State, Tugela in KwaZulu-Natal and Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape, bringing the total to six clinics.

In 2003, a further two Roadside Wellness Centre's were set up in Hanover in the Northern Cape and Komatipoort in Mpumalanga. This made the TWP's services to be accessible on the N1, N2 and the N4. Another milestone for the TWP was the introduction of the first Mobile Wellness Centre in the form of a Mercedes Benz Sprinter. This made it possible for the TWP to visit companies and provide onsite health screening.

2003 also witnessed the launch of the logistics industry's Wellness Fund whose purpose was to create a tailor-made health plan that provides broader support to increase the health and wellness of industry members.

The year 2004 saw another Roadside Wellness Centre opened in Mooi River in KwaZulu-Natal leading to better service along the N3 corridor between Johannesburg and Durban.

In 2005, the TWP opened two more Roadside Wellness Centres, in Zeerust in the North West, and East London in the Eastern Cape.

"In 2006, through forming strategic partnerships the NBCRFLI was able to expand the TWP's footprint thus positioning it at the forefront of pioneering unique and innovative services. One of these much-admired services was the National Mobile HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) service, which made it easier for industry members to get tested and learn more about HIV/AIDS. The HIV counselling offered at our Mobile HCT is rooted in providing emotional and psychological support."

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In 2006 two more Mobile Wellness Centres were launched, bringing the total to three vehicles. Another Roadside Wellness Centre was established in Kokstad in KwaZulu-Natal.

In 2008, a Roadside Wellness Centre was established in Marianhill in KwaZulu-Natal. This brought the number of Roadside Wellness Centres located across South Africa to 14.

A fourth vehicle was added to our Mobile Wellness fleet. Another milestone was when the TWP attended the World AIDS conference in Mexico where they showcased their concept on the international stage.

In 2009 the TWP continued to expand with the introduction of two more Roadside Wellness Centres in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape and Colesburg in the Northern Cape.

Another two Roadside Wellness Centres established in Villiers in the Free State and Epping in the Western Cape in 2010. This was followed by the handover and management of three Roadside Wellness Centres in Gauteng.

2010 also saw the ground-breaking step of providing comprehensive HIV treatment and Anti-retrieval therapy (ART) to HIV positive road freight and logistics members as well as their spouses. Over 10 000 members have been enrolled since the inception of the program. With consistently higher than 90% adherence rates, the HIV Treatment Programme has ensured that HIV Positive industry members are able to remain well and active at work.

In addition to the two wellness centres that were opened in Warden in the Free State and Roodekop in Gauteng in 2011, ten more vehicles were purchased for the mobile wellness unit. In pursuit of improving our service offerings we improved and realigned our HIV policy to be industry-specific. Two test pilot projects were created for this purpose. An electronic health management system was introduced in six of the Roadside Wellness Centres. A new project was also launched in six provinces which enabled HIV positive patients to receive their CD4 count.

The TWP had an opportunity to showcase its work at the 26th IUSTI (International Union Against Sexually Transmitted Infection (IUSTI) Europe Conference on STIs & HIV/AIDS and the 10th BADV Congress which was held on September 8-10, 2011 in Riga, Latvia.

In 2012, the TWP expanded its services to include assisting companies in managing and mitigating the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic through a variety of governance, assessment, surveillance, planning and monitoring strategies. More educational material was created to ensure industry members were informed on HIV/AIDS, STI and TB. Part of the educational also focussed how industry players could incorporate implementable strategies in their healthy lifestyle programmes.

In 2013, TWP conducted tailor made workshops that dealt with the scourge of human trafficking, through tailor made workshops. These workshops assisted healthcare staff of the TWP to educate and inform the industry about the prevalence of sex-trafficking and methods on how to combat human trafficking. The TWP was also a prominent attendee at the 6th SA AIDS Conference, where it showcased and shared its successes... and more importantly, lessons learned. Tertius Wessels explains, "The beginning of the decade brought great success which has compelled us to continue providing industry members with new and innovative methods. The work done by the TWP was also being showcased across the globe, which brought many accolades and positive responses from other organisations fighting against HIV/AIDS. This exposure gave us an opportunity to share ideas on what the next step should be and what the future holds in the war against HIV/AIDS."

In 2014, the Fleet Owner Workplace Wellness Programme was launched in association with Mercedes Benz South Africa and the National Bargaining Council for the Road Freight and Logistics Industry. As part of employers' commitment towards health and wellness, the programme ensures that industry members have access to health, wellness, behavioural change, disease prevention and information.

In 2015, the four Roadside Wellness Centres in Musina, Colesburg, Hanover and Epping were revamped. This was done in order to enable both the staff and visitors to enjoy the benefits of improved facilities and better service. A major partnership was also formed with the Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU) Worker Health Program to enhance the work done by TWP.

The fleet of Mobile Wellness Centres were increased with the addition of five Ford Rangers and two Mercedes Benz Vitos.

In 2016, the renovation of Roadside Wellness Centres continued with the revamping of Marianhill, Warden, Villiers, Kokstad, Port Elizabeth, East London and Roodekop.

Education was a key component of our work in 2017, with five nurses attending a dispensing course. A cloud-based data capturing system was also introduced to all Mobile Wellness Centres. Also in 2017, phase one of the IT system was put into operation in our mobile unit by CODE systems whose software was sponsored by The Foundation for Professional Development.

In 2018, the TWP had another opportunity once again to showcase at the International AIDS conference in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

The TWP applied for all nurses in its service to obtain dispensing licenses from the South African National Department of Health, thus enabling improved and effective service delivery.

"I'm really proud of the TWP and its partners, for what they have achieved. Having worked in the logistics industry for many years, I have witnessed the importance of the TWP and how it turned the tide against HIV/AIDS. Today it is widely respected for all the work it is doing, for the industry as a whole. Our commitment remains unshaken in terms of meeting and exceeding our obligations, not only for our members but in ensuring that we set the benchmark for HIV/AIDS prevention, testing, treatment and care internationally," said Themba Mthombeni, TWP's operations manager.

Mthombeni further adds, "The TWP has expanded and gradually included all people associated with the road freight and logistics industry. We ensure that the industry as a whole benefits from the TWP. Our services have always included communities surrounding the areas we serve as well as sex workers. Health information and education is the cornerstone of our success. Sharing knowledge and information is important for the success and sustainability of the TWP."

The success of TWP does not only hinge on the work done by those in its employ, but also on the commitment and support of our sponsors. Without the sponsors' encouragement and backing the TWP would have only achieved a fraction of its success.

Mrs Famida Rahman, NBCRFLI's Funds and Wellness Administration General Manager concurred, "It's a trifeacta effect. We have the TWP, the industry members and sponsors. Without these three uniting we wouldn't have the environment to achieve this kind of success. Our sponsors are our biggest champions because they push us to set higher standards and define new paths for other industries to follow. We pay homage to our sponsors because the TWP wouldn't be what it is today without them encouraging us and providing the resources they do.

We truly appreciate all sponsors of the Trucking Wellness Programme, both in the past and present, for the support and commitment to the programme and we welcome future sponsorships."

Mr Musa Ndlovu, NBCRFLI's National Secretary sums it up well when he says, "As the TWP celebrates 20 years, we are reminded of the wonder in providing a world-class service and pushing the health and wellness of the logistics industry forward. The TWP has had an incredible impact not only on the industry but communities throughout South Africa; not only in the fight against HIV and AIDS, but all devastating lifestyle ailments like Diabetes and Hypertension. Our services are comprehensive and holistic. We ensure that our industry members are confident that we provide the world class service that is expected. For us, the TWP is about building trust with the industry members, families, surrounding communities and sex workers. If they trust us, they will visit us and receive the information they require to build a better future not only for themselves but the industry as well."

The journey of the past 20 years has firmly placed us on the path of innovation. The lessons of the past have clearly spelt out for us that the future of the TWP will continue to be driven by innovation, growth and improved quality of service informed by the ever changing needs of its clients. This exciting journey forward will remain focussed on the prevention, treatment and care of HIV, STI's and other lifestyle diseases.

SPONSORS: Sida - 2006 – 2012; Regent 2012-2014; MBSA (Mercedes Benz South Africa) -2010 – Present; Engen – 2012-2015; Imperial – 2004 – Present; Unitrans – 2018; N3Tc – 2012 – Present
Reef Tankers - 2011 – Present; SACTWU – 2016-2018; TNT – 2006 – 2008;
PARTNERS: RFA; NEASA; Department of Health – 2002 – Present; SATAWU; MTWU; TAWUSA; PTAWU; Department of Transport; TB Reach; SABCOHA (South African Business Coalition on Health and Aids)

